

Why schools should desist from early reporting for term one

As Uganda prepares for the 2026 academic year, a worrying trend persists in primary schools, where Primary Six and Seven learners are being called to resume studies as early as January 5, despite the education ministry setting February 2 as the opening date for term one. Often justified as “exam preparation”, this practice raises concerns about policy compliance, equity, civic responsibility and child development.

School calendars are not optional suggestions. When government communicates an official reporting date, it is intended to apply uniformly across institutions, except for the allowance of the staggering week that may be justified earlier or later. Allowing some schools to operate outside this framework undermines national coordination and subjects parents, learners and teachers to unnecessary pressure.

It also sets a dangerous precedent where institutional convenience overrides public policy. The timing is particularly troubling given Uganda's

electoral calendar. January 15 and January 22 have been set aside for elections, an important civic process protected by the Constitution. Teachers and school staff, like all citizens, have the right and duty to vote. Requiring them to be in school during this period either disenfranchises them or forces an unfair choice between professional obligations and civic responsibility.

Notably, national institutions have shown greater sensitivity. The Uganda National Examinations Board rescheduled the marking and scoring of Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education from January 2026 to December 2025 in recognition of the election period. Many churches, too, have adjusted programmes to respect the national mood. If examining bodies and faith institutions can align with the electoral calendar, why should primary schools act differently?

Beyond policy and politics, January is not idle time for children. It is a critical period for family interaction, community learning and informal education. During the holidays,



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children contribute to household responsibilities, participate in religious and cultural activities and learn life skills that formal classrooms cannot fully offer. In a season when the nation seeks peace and security, it is reassuring and emotionally grounding for families to remain together.

From an instructional design

perspective, more time in school does not automatically lead to better learning. Research consistently shows that fatigue, stress and burnout reduce motivation and retention. Compressing rest periods in the name of exam performance often produces anxious learners and superficial learning driven by drilling rather than understanding.

The comparison with secondary schools is unavoidable. If Senior Four and Senior Six candidates, who also face national examinations, can wait, until February to resume, why should younger primary candidates be treated differently? Early reporting also imposes unnecessary financial strain on parents who are compelled to pay transport costs multiple times, to and from, sometimes only for learners to be sent home again during the election period. If schools anticipate releasing learners for this season, there is no justification for the extra expense. Children would be better left at home, contributing meaningfully to household activities.

Encouragingly, alternative leadership models exist. One

secondary school head teacher, Fredrick Sentumbwe, surprised parents and learners alike by announcing that holiday studies would not be necessary. Learners celebrated the decision, while staff appreciated the time to rest, reflect, and prepare for life beyond formal employment. This is leadership rooted in trust, professionalism, and respect for human rights.

Government intervention in this is, therefore, essential. Clear directives must be enforced, not merely announced. Schools that violate the national calendar should be held accountable and parents empowered to question unlawful practices without fear of disadvantaging their children. Education must prepare learners not just for examinations, but for life. A disciplined education system respects time, law, family and the holistic development of the child. As a nation, we must ask ourselves: are we educating children for mere exams, or for life?

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